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SUBJECT: AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY PROGRAMS SPUR IDENTITY DISCUSSION
IN SUDAN

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Public Affairs Section (PAS) in Khartoum and the U.S. Consulate General in Juba cast a wide net within civil society for this year's African-American History Month programming. Participants sought to learn from America's experience in combating racism, addressing cultural diversity and, ultimately, arriving at a sense of national identity. Pulled in two directions, Sudan's population feels it belongs to both the Arab world and to Black Africa. Discussions explored how the country can reconcile the two and, through this meeting point, establish the nation's strength.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The program began in Juba with a discussion via Digital Video Conference (DVC) with Africa Regional Services (ARS) Paris. With the Consul General as moderator, in Juba, Cultural Affairs Officer Sheldon Austin discussed President Barack Obama's autobiography "Dreams from My Father" to an audience of university students, professors and local media. Like the Kenyans, southern Sudanese "claim" President Obama as one of their own due to ethnic and kinship ties. Interest in the topic was high. Participants sought clarity on what President Obama's Africa policy would be, how he could have a Muslim father and profess a belief in Christianity, and why he would write a book on his father when it was his mother who taught him the lessons of life. The program was a first in Juba and demonstrated strong interest there in follow-up discussions on related topics. Participants put election-related issues at the top of their list of priorities for the next event.

¶3. (SBU) In Khartoum, PAS partnered with the Juba University Equatoria Students Cultural Association (JUESCA) for outreach to the far-flung Kadaro Campus of the University of Juba. JUESCA brings together some sixteen ethnic groupings of the South. The campus had not benefited from any U.S. Embassy programming in the past and was, in fact, initially resistant to the idea. However, as southerners in northern Sudan, these largeQe"@ classes to permit students to attend.

¶4. (SBU) "African-American Experience: First-Hand Testimonies" featured a panel of seven African-Americans. Of these, four gave presentations. The latter topics addressed issues of duality: "First Impressions of the United States (Myth Versus Reality)"; "The African Diaspora Experience," "Growing up African, Becoming American"; "What Is Positive in American Society for African-Americans, and What Still Needs to Change." Discussion was lively and enabled students to dispel many popularly-held misconceptions about the present state of race relations in America and about African-Americans' sense of identity and assimilation into American society. The frank and open dialogue created a bond between the university and the Embassy, one which students and administrators asked PAS to continue in the form of future partnerships. In written comments about the program, one student asked the Embassy to "assist students with effective skills in communication, language, management, and leadership." The Embassy made generous use of america.gov articles as well as IIP publications and resource suggestions.

¶5. (SBU) The ARS Paris-led Khartoum DVC combined an audience of intellectuals, journalists, nongovernmental organization representatives and two VIPs. Speaker Eddy Harris hit a raw nerve with his topic "Black Americans/Black Africans: What Are the

Commonalities beyond Race?" as issues of race and national belonging are still sensitive in Sudan. Participants asked repeatedly how they could learn from the American experience and use it to their advantage, given Sudan's racial, ethnic and religious diversity. Many stated they were pulled in two opposite directions: toward the Arab world as well as the African heartland. One participant recalled emotionally how at a conference in England, two opposing groups - one Arab and the other Black African - literally pulled on each of her arms in an attempt to get her to join their respective sides. As a solution to the dichotomy, an educator participating via DVC proposed that Sudan be the "meeting point." "[Sudan] is the combination that brings people together," he noted, with regard to the participant's crisis of identity. Eddy Harris ably fielded challenging questions about accepting diversity and fostering citizenship, suggesting, "the nation state is the new tribe of the modern world."

¶6. (SBU) At Omdurman Islamic University student center, the Information Resource Center (IRC) presented the film "Everyday Use," based on the homonymous novel by Alice Walker. Three lecturers and twenty-two students joined for this screening and discussion. IRC material on African-American literature, the short story text, and biography of the author were distributed.

¶7. (SBU) English-language independent daily "Khartoum Monitor," which presents a southern Sudan editorial and reporting line, ran a quarter-page article on February 21 about the Juba University cultural dialogue encounter. It quoted one of the panelists, who praised President Barack Obama as a role model: "The most powerful man in the world has a lovely family, which is showing the physical and moral beauty of Black America at its best."

FERNANDEZ